



THE
BUSY BODY.

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[Price TWO-PENCE.]

Homo sum, nihil humani a me alienum esse puto. TER.

THURSDAY, October the 11th, 1759.



THE platonic maxim "That we are not introduced into the present scene of existence, purely for our own sakes," has always regulated my conduct. If any disadvantages have resulted from a principle so noble, I have always looked upon them in the same light as divines do on natural evils, and esteemed them not only useful, but even amiable. I have indeed followed the divine rule, "of loving my neighbours as well as myself," with so much assiduity, that I should sooner doubt of my own existence, than imagine that others could exist without my assistance. That this principle is not peculiar to myself, is evident from the general converse of coffee-houses, the dissipation of amusements, and the chat of the tea-table.

As a man is not the object of his own sight, so his immediate concerns are seldom the subject of his own thoughts, or the topics of his own conversation. And, if the defects of others afford everlasting funds for discourse, why should not the good of others afford us equal opportunities of acting in their favour? All my acquaintance must do me the justice to own, that no counsellor even after a ten guinea fee, ever exerted himself with half that vigour in behalf of his client, which I have done in favour of a friend, though I was certain to suffer for my advice,

or expose myself to ruin by my interposition. To comprehend what I have said, read on:

TOM WARD is a considerable trader, dwelling near the famous edifice erected at the charge of Sir T. Gresham. If money can convey the idea of dignity, he can produce at least fifty thousand arguments of that kind in his favour. If a knowledge of one's own interest will denominate a man wise, not even that of Solomon would deserve a preference. But as accumulating has employed all his thoughts, enjoying is what he is an utter stranger to. Castaigne's tables are his bible; profit and loss the most considerable account in his ledger, and *cent. per cent.* the key of his transactions. He looks on misfortune as an indication of stupidity, and laughs at honest poverty as the most ridiculous object, that can present itself to the human imagination. Gain is his *summum bonum*, parsimony his favourite virtue, and generosity the perpetual topic of his raillery. As he lived near, he could not be unknown to me; and, though I might not always be welcome, like the philosopher who stiled himself a citizen of the world, I looked upon myself as a member of his family, and esteemed his house as my own. I made him continual offers of my service, which he never rejected, when he thought them productive of his own emolument: which he never accepted when he imagined that they would turn out to the advantage of another. Many a time have I rid as fast as Henley to secure him a bargain; many a time have I gone to Plymouth, at my own expence, to procure him a country-chap. As I knew the man's failing, I always treated him at my own house, when I had got scent of any thing, which would turn out to his advantage; for fear the expence of a bottle, would have rendered him unable to attend to my reasons, or the idea of charge would have made him averse to the engagement. Thus being obliged to bribe my friend Tom to follow his natural propensity; I emptied my cellar to fill his chest; and by frequenting his house, was looked upon as a person of congenial principles. I wish, indeed, the opinion had been carried a little farther, and that I might have been reputed not only a person of similar principles, but likewise of equal riches. This glorious mistake would have opened a wide field for the excursions of my officious activity, and would have continually supplied fresh objects for the exertion of indefatigable benevolence. Every proposal, which disinterested kindness induced me to make, was immediately stigmatized as lucrative selfishness, and though humanity inspired all my actions, avarice was suspected to be my ruling passion. A man of my disposition was not to be intimidated

dated by difficulties, or silenced by mistakes. Like the person of solid integrity, described by Horace, I persisted in spite of clamour, in spite of danger, in spite of calamity; resolute either to attain my ends, or enoble myself by my disappointment. The warmth, however, with which I espoused my friend Ward's interest, not only alienated the minds of my other neighbours, but made even him averse to me. As he examined my conduct by the same principles, which influenced his own; he concluded that it was my design to make a penny of him, forbade me his house, and refused to hear me in my own vindication.

Thus deprived of an opportunity to do good to my neighbours, I could not but make reflections on my conduct, and exclaim, like my progenitors, not against the ill effects of unreasonable officiousness, but at the depravity of the times: and, had not my heart got the better of my head, should certainly have abandoned the characteristic principle of the family of the BUSY-BODIES.

HONEST JACK HARBIN, next door to me, was of a disposition opposite to that of Ward. The generosity of his principles made me strongly suspect his legitimacy; they were so similar to those of my ancestors, that I should not have blushed to have owned him as a relation. But his constant application to business at home; his indifference to all pieces of news, which were communicated to him, and his absolute ignorance of the domestic affairs of those who lived near him, were qualities not to be reconciled with the distinguishing virtues of the BUSY-BODIES, and made me, on second thoughts, rather wish, than suspect him to be related to us. Though he knew the connections I had with Ward, had prejudiced others against me, yet he had too much candour to conclude us under the same predicament.

I soon introduced myself to his acquaintance, and convinced him, I not inherited only the name, but likewise the qualities of my ancestors. The countenance he shewed me dissipated, in some measure, the odium with which, the rest of my neighbours regarded me. In proportion as the circle of my acquaintance increased, I endeavoured to enlarge the sphere of my gratitude. Every new friend, by my recommendation, proved a new customer, and every favour he shewed me in return, served as an incentive to a farther exertion of my interest in his favour. Lucre is, sometimes, productive of confidence: In my neighbour it was abundantly so; and I might, with propriety, have said, that I bought him with the money of others.

AMONG

AMONG other happy effects of my friendship and interest, let me mention that ten journey-men left his service, because they would not submit to my directions; fifteen maids were turned away within the year, being over-heard, when they stigmatized me with the title of a *Busy Fellow, Medler and Officious Puppy*; two of his sons were sent to a boarding school in the north, two to one in the south, and three to another in the west, for not conforming to my regulations: his daughter was likewise sent to Marybone boarding school, for combining with one of the maids in pinning a dish-clout to my tail, for making some necessary observations on the art of roasting a pig, and the best method of making whipp'd syllabub. His wife, who was a person of unblemished morals, was honoured with a separate maintenance on account of my intercepting a letter, she had wrote in answer to the following advertisement in the Daily Advertiser.

“THE tall lady in a blue sack, who sat in the front row of the
 “green boxes at Drury-Lane house last night, and offered a well-
 “set gentleman pitted with the small-pox, a pinch of snuff, which
 “dazzled him with the charms of one of the finest and whitest
 “hands that ever was seen; is desired to direct a line to Z. Z. at
 “George’s coffee-house near the Temple, appointing the place
 “and time when he may have the pleasure of seeing her. As
 “nothing but honour is intended in the desired interview, she
 “may recollect that he was dressed in a blue plush coat, and a
 “crimson waistcoat embroidered with gold; the repartees against
 “matrimony; and the free observations on Polydore’s speech
 “may be hints for her recollecting the person, who handed her
 “to her coach, and sighed at his parting.”

THE manner in which I made this discovery, was as follows; as I was employed in giving orders to the man behind the counter, I over-heard the lady whispering to a porter, ‘besure you
 ‘don’t drop it; besure you deliver it at the bar yourself, and
 ‘there’s half a crown for your trouble.’ When the man left the house I followed, and over-taking him, asked him to carry a message for me, on his consenting, told him that I must step into the next public-house to write, and if he would stay the while, would give him a tankard of porter. We went into the George, and calling for pen, ink and paper for myself, and a tankard for him, I scrawled a few lines, which I directed, and delivered to him, together with a shilling. He put my letter into the same pocket as he had done the lady’s, which observing, I asked him to let me see it again, because I had omitted something material: as he was no great scholar, he immediately gave me that which was wrote by the lady, being unable to read the direction. I im-
 mediately

mediately opened the letter, and finding by the contents, that my friend's wife prided herself more in her personal charms than her virtue; put it into my pocket; directed two lines of nonsense to George's, and ran to my friend to inform him of the intrigue of his lady. The consequence of my application I have mentioned already.

JACK SMART, the linen-draper, was of genteel personage, polite address, famous for his white hand, admired for his *small talk*, and consequently much in the good graces of the ladies. Opposite his station, behind the counter, hung a glass with a handsome carved frame, which was embellished with the metamorphosis of Narcissus. As this faithful mirror had convinced him of the delicacy of his figure, he resolved to fling away a few guineas upon his portrait, before time had robbed him of his charms, or misfortune had stripped him of his habillements. As soon as I was informed of his intention, I went to his house to recommend Aurelliani the Italian; who being very much celebrated for his paintings of butterflies, I thought the most proper person to take the likeness of a beau. The next Sunday was the first time appointed for his sitting, when it was impossible for me to attend him. However Jack was drawn in the attitude I recommended, which was that of Shakespear in the Abbey; but instead of a book, resting his hand on a piece of muslin. Before the piece was finished, I attended several times, and persuaded the painter so often, by Jack's consent, to soften or darken the shades, that when it was brought home he cursed the painter: Aurelliani himself was ashamed to own the piece; and I lost Jack's acquaintance for having recommended Aurelliani, while the painter exposed Jack for seconding my remarks, and employed a porter to drub me for having made them.

WILL. WAGSTAFF, the cheesemonger, reputed for his facetiousness and excellent singing, was generally president at the meeting of the choice spirits of his days. In him were united the low drollery of Shuter, and the mimic excellence of Foot; but his chief talent lay in taking off Dr. Ward, the medicinal, and Mr. Whitfield the theological empiric. He had a daughter as melting as his butter in the summer; and as high relished as parmesan. His constant expression, when speaking of her, was that she would not keep, unless salted down very soon. I took the hint, and helped her to a sweetheart. He was a student of the Middle Temple, and at mother ———'s in Convent-Garden. The numerous stories with which he furnished me of the secret history of those regions of love, gave
me

me a high opinion of his virtues: and the number of gloves he bought of me for ready cash, convinced me both of his decency and fortune. The forwardness of his temper, and the frankness of his address, the fluency of his eloquence, the universality of his acquaintance, and the high opinion he had of the family of the BUSY-BODIES, made me look on him, as the most considerable person among the professors of the law. What especially endeared him to me was the warmth with which he would expatiate on unconfined benevolence, the ignorance of prime ministers; the politick gravity of physicians, the vicious lives of preachers, the decay of learning in our universities, the ill tendency of theatrical exhibitions, the exorbitant expences at the inns of court, the want of courage in our officers, the indecent appearance of our females, and the bad tendency of the Foundling Hospital, the Magdalen-House, and the Asylum. I introduced him to the acquaintance of Wagstaff, and he introduced himself to that of Miss Anna Maria, his daughter. The father being assured by me of the honour and fortune of Babble, thought he had provided against an accident, which he was apprehensive might happen to his daughter. But alas! how short sighted is human prudence! The courtship had scarce been prosecuted three days, when he luckily overheard Babble proposing something to Miss Anna Maria, inconsistent with my modesty to mention. Enraged at the dishonour intended his family, he kicked Babble down stairs, who brought, against him, an action of assault and battery, and, on the trial, obtained considerable damages. Miss Anna Maria, notwithstanding this incident, kept up a correspondence by letter with her lover, which my assiduity discovered to her father; who out of a principle of honour and humanity, sent her to a mad-house not far from Stepney, where she is confined to this day. As for myself I fell under the lash of his comic genius, and was taken off with so much ridiculous exactness in all his clubs, that I was ashamed for some time to show my face, at any tavern in the neighbour-hood.

N. B. In Numb. V. will be given an original Poem of the late Dean Swift, communicated to the BUSY BODY, by a nobleman of distinguished learning and taste.

IN order to oblige such of my relations, as choose to promote my work, Mr. POTTINGER, my publisher, at the *Dunciad* in Pater-noster-Row, has, in allusion to his own sign, and to the fable of Apuleius, placed a *Golden Ass* in his shop, to receive their offerings; and I doubt not but their contributions will make his *Ass* as famous for its wit, as *Button's Lion* was for its eloquence.